THE MORAL BASIS OF VEGETARIANISM

BY

M. K. GANDHI

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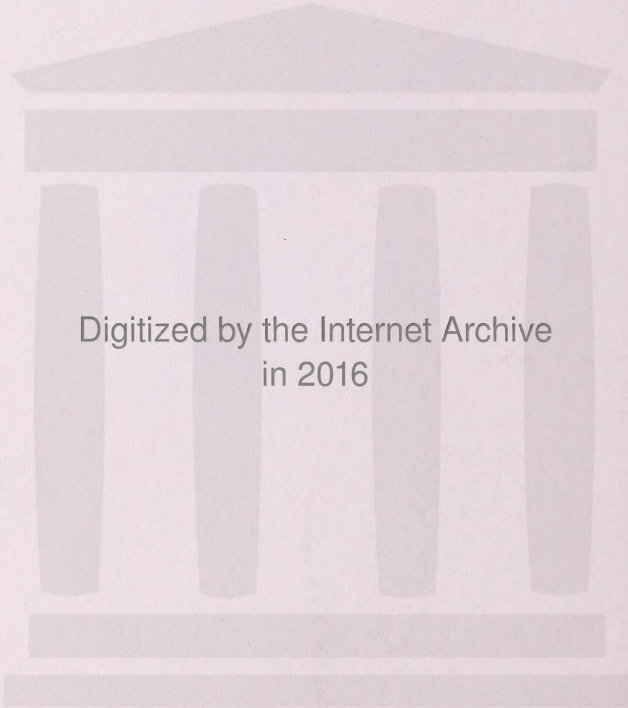
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
1. FOOD VALUES	3
2. UNFIRED FOOD	13
3. VITAL NEED FOR RESEARCH	16
4. VEGETARIANISM	18
5. NOT AN END IN ITSELF	21
6. THE MORAL BASIS OF VEGETARIANISM	23
7. OUR DAILY DIET	28
8. MINIMUM DIET	33

THE MORAL BASIS OF VEGETARIANISM

CHAPTER 1

FOOD VALUES

Whilst it is true that man cannot live without air and water, the thing that nourishes the body is food. Hence the saying, food is life.

Food can be divided into three categories : vegetarian, flesh and mixed. Flesh foods include fowl and fish. Milk is an animal product and cannot by any means be included in a strictly vegetarian diet. It serves the purpose of meat to a very large extent. In medical language it is classified as animal food. A layman does not consider milk to be animal food. On the other hand, eggs are regarded by the layman as a flesh food. In reality, they are not. Nowadays sterile eggs are also produced. The hen is not allowed to see the cock and yet it lays eggs. A sterile egg never develops into a chick. Therefore, he who can take milk should have no objection to taking sterile eggs.

Medical opinion is mostly in favour of a mixed diet, although there is a growing school, which is strongly of the opinion that anatomical and physiological evidence is in favour of man being a vegetarian. His teeth, his stomach, intestines etc. seem to prove that nature has meant man to be a vegetarian.

Vegetarian diet, besides grains, pulses, edible roots, tubers and leaves, includes fruits, both fresh and dry. Dry fruit includes nuts like almonds, pistachio, walnut etc.

Milk

I have always been in favour of pure vegetarian diet. But experience has taught me that in order to

keep perfectly fit, vegetarian diet must include milk and milk products such as curds, butter, *ghee* etc. This is a significant departure from my original idea. I excluded milk from my diet for six years. At that time, I felt none the worse for the denial. But in the year 1917, as a result of my own ignorance, I was laid down with severe dysentery. I was reduced to a skeleton, but I stubbornly refused to take any medicine and with equal stubbornness refused to take milk or buttermilk. But I could not build up my body and pick up sufficient strength to leave the bed. I had taken a vow of not taking milk. A medical friend suggested that at the time of taking the vow, I could have had in mind only the milk of the cow and buffalo; why should the vow prevent me from taking goat's milk? My wife supported him and I yielded. Really speaking, for one who has given up milk, though at the time of taking the vow only the cow and the buffalo were in mind, milk should be taboo. All animal milks have practically the same composition, though the proportion of the components varies in each case. So I may be said to have kept merely the letter, not the spirit, of the vow. Be that as it may, goat's milk was produced immediately and I drank it. It seemed to bring me new life. I picked up rapidly and was soon able to leave the bed. On account of this and several similar experiences, I have been forced to admit the necessity of adding milk to the strict vegetarian diet. But I am convinced that in the vast vegetable kingdom there must be some kind, which, while supplying those necessary substances which we derive from milk and meat, is free from their drawbacks, ethical and other.

In my opinion there are definite drawbacks in taking milk or meat. In order to get meat we have to kill. And we are certainly not entitled to any other milk

except the mother's milk in our infancy. Over and above the moral drawback, there are others, purely from the point of view of health. Both milk and meat bring with them the defects of the animal from which they are derived. Domesticated cattle are hardly ever perfectly healthy. Just like man, cattle suffer from innumerable diseases. Several of these are overlooked even when the cattle are subjected to periodical medical examinations. Besides, medical examination of all the cattle in India seems to be an impossible feat, at any rate for the present. What applies to the milch cattle applies to a much greater extent to the animals slaughtered for meat. As a general rule, man just depends upon luck to escape from such risks. He does not seem to worry much about his health. He considers himself to be quite safe in his medical fortress in the shape of doctors, *vaids* and *hakims*. His main worry and concern is how to get wealth and position in society. This worry overshadows all the rest. Therefore, so long as some selfless scientist does not, as a result of patient research work, discover a vegetable substitute for milk and meat, man will go on taking meat and milk.

Now let us consider mixed diet. Man requires food which can supply tissue building substances to provide for the growth and daily wear and tear of the body. It should also contain something which can supply energy, fat, certain salts and roughage to help the excretion of waste matter. Tissue building substances are known as proteins. They are obtained from milk, meat, eggs, pulses and nuts. The proteins contained in milk and meat, in other words, the animal proteins being more easily digestible and assimilable, are much more valuable than vegetable proteins. Milk is superior to meat. The medicoes tell us that in cases where meat cannot be

digested, milk is digested quite easily. For vegetarians milk, being the only source of animal proteins, is a very important article of diet. The proteins in raw eggs are considered to be the most easily digestible of all proteins.

But everybody cannot afford to drink milk. And milk is not available in every place. I would like to mention here a very important fact with regard to milk. Contrary to the popular belief, skimmed milk is a very valuable article of diet. There are times when it proves even more useful than whole milk. The chief function of milk is to supply animal proteins for tissue building and tissue repair. Skimming, while it partially removes the fats, does not affect the proteins at all. Moreover, the available skimming instruments cannot remove all the fat from milk. Neither is there any likelihood of such an instrument being constructed.

Cereals

The body requires other things besides milk, whole or skimmed. I give the second place to cereals — wheat, rice, *juwar*, *bajri* etc. These are used as the staple diet. Different cereals are used as staple in different provinces of India. In many places, more than one kind of cereals are eaten at the same time, for instance, small quantities of wheat, *bajri* and rice are often served together. This mixture is not necessary for the nourishment of the body. It makes it difficult to regulate the quantity of food intake, and puts an extra strain upon digestion. As all these varieties supply starch mainly, it is better to take one only, at a time. Wheat may well be described as the king among the cereals. If we glance at the world map, we find that wheat occupies the first place. From the point of view of health, if we can get wheat, rice and other cereals become unnecessary. If wheat is not

available and *juwar* etc. cannot be taken on account of dislike or difficulty in digesting them, rice has to be resorted to.

The cereals should be properly cleansed, ground on a grinding stone, and the resulting flour used as it is. Sieving of the flour should be avoided. It is likely to remove the *bhusi* or the pericarp which is a rich source of salts and vitamins, both of which are most valuable from the point of view of nutrition. The pericarp also supplies roughage, which helps the action of the bowels. Rice grain being very delicate, nature has provided it with an outer covering or epicarp. This is not edible. In order to remove this inedible portion, rice has to be pounded. Pounding should be just sufficient to remove the epicarp on the outer skin of the rice grain. But machine pounding not only removes the outer skin, but also polishes the rice by removing its pericarp. The explanation of the popularity of polished rice lies in the fact that polishing helps preservation. The pericarp is very sweet and unless it is removed, rice is easily attacked by certain organisms. Polished rice and wheat without its pericarp, supply us with almost pure starch. Important constituents of the cereals are lost with the removal of the pericarp. The pericarp of rice is sold as rice polishings. This and the pericarp of wheat can be cooked and eaten by themselves. They can be also made into *chapatis* or cakes. It is possible that rice *chapatis* may be more easily digestible than whole rice and in this form a lesser quantity may result in full satisfaction.

We are in the habit of dipping each morsel of the *chapati* in vegetable or *dal* gravy before eating it. The result is that most people swallow their food without proper mastication. Mastication is an important step in

the process of digestion, especially that of starch. Digestion of starch begins on its coming into contact with saliva in the mouth. Mastication ensures a thorough mixing of food with saliva. Therefore, starchy foods should be eaten in a relatively dry form, which results in a greater flow of saliva and also necessitates their thorough mastication.

Pulses

After the starch supplying cereals come the protein supplying pulses — beans, lentils etc. Almost everybody seems to think that pulses are an essential constituent of diet. Even meat eaters must have pulses. It is easy to understand that those who have to do hard manual work and who cannot afford to drink milk, cannot do without pulses. But I can say without any hesitation whatsoever that those who follow sedentary occupations as for instance, clerks, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, teachers and those who are not too poor to buy milk, do not require pulses. Pulses are generally considered to be difficult to digest and are eaten in a much smaller quantity than cereals. Out of the varieties of pulses, peas, gram and haricot beans are considered to be the most and *mung* and *masoor* (lentils) the least difficult to digest.

Vegetables

Vegetables and fruits should come third on our list. One would expect them to be cheap and easily available in India. But it is not so. They are generally considered to be delicacies meant for the city people. In the villages fresh vegetables are a rarity, and in most places fruit is also not available. This shortage of greens and fruits is a slur on the administration of India. The villagers can grow plenty of green vegetables if they wish to. The question of fruit cannot be solved

so easily. The land legislation is bad from the villager's standpoint. But I am transgressing.

Among fresh vegetables, a fair amount of leafy vegetables must be taken every day. I do not include potatoes, sweet potatoes, *suran* etc., which supply starch mainly, among vegetables. They should be put down in the same category as starch supplying cereals. A fair helping of ordinary fresh vegetables in advisable. Certain varieties such as cucumber, tomatoes, mustard and cress and other tender leaves need not be cooked. They should be washed properly and then eaten raw in small quantities.

Fruits

As for fruits, our daily diet should include the available fruits of the season, e.g. mangoes, *jambu*, guavas, grapes, *papaiyas*, limes — sweet or sour, oranges, *moosambi*, etc. should all be used in their season. The best time for taking fruit is in the early morning. A breakfast of fruit and milk should give full satisfaction. Those who take an early lunch may well have a breakfast of fruit only.

Banana is a good fruit. But as it is very rich in starch, it takes the place of bread. Milk and banana make a perfect meal.

Ghee and Oil

A certain amount of fat is also necessary. This can be had in the form of *ghee* or oil. If *ghee* can be had, oil becomes unnecessary. It is difficult to digest and is not so nourishing as pure *ghee*. An ounce and a half of *ghee* per head per day, should be considered ample to supply the needs of the body. Whole milk also is a source of *ghee*. Those who cannot afford it should take enough oil to supply the need for fat. Among oils, sweet oil,

groundnut oil and cocoanut oil should be given preference. Oil must be fresh. If available, it is better to use hand-pressed oil. Oil and *ghee* sold in the bazaar are generally quite useless. It is a matter of great sorrow and shame. But so long as honesty has not become an integral part of business morals, whether through legislation or through education, the individual will have to procure the pure article with patience and diligence. One should never be satisfied to take what one can get, irrespective of its quality. It is far better to do without *ghee* and oil altogether than to eat rancid oil and adulterated *ghee*. As in the case of fats, a certain amount of sugar is also necessary. Although sweet fruits supply plenty of sugar, there is no harm in taking one to one and a half ounces of sugar, brown or white, in the day. If one cannot get sweet fruits, sugar may become a necessity. But the undue prominence given to sweet things nowadays is wrong. City folk eat too much of sweet things. Milk puddings, milk sweets and sweets of other kinds are consumed in large quantities. They are all unnecessary and are harmful except when taken in very small quantities. It may be said without any fear of exaggeration that to partake of sweetmeats and other delicacies, in a country where the millions do not even get an ordinary full meal, is equivalent to robbery.

What applies to sweets, applies with equal force to *ghee* and oil. There is no need to eat food fried in *ghee* or oil. To use up *ghee* in making *puris* and *laddus* is thoughtless extravagance. Those who are not used to such food cannot eat these things at all. For instance, Englishmen on their first coming into our country cannot eat our sweets and fried foodstuffs. Those that do eat them I have often seen fall ill. Taste is acquired, not

born with us. All the delicacies of the world cannot equal the relish that hunger gives to food. A hungry man will eat a dry piece of bread with the greatest relish, whereas one who is not hungry will refuse the best of sweetmeats.

How often and How Much to Eat

Now let us consider how often and how much should one eat. Food should be taken as a matter of duty — even as a medicine — to sustain the body, never for the satisfaction of the palate. Thus, pleasurable feeling comes from satisfaction of real hunger. Therefore, we can say that relish is dependent upon hunger and not outside it. Because of our wrong habits and artificial way of living, very few people know what their system requires. Our parents who bring us into this world do not, as a rule, cultivate self-control. Their habits and their way of living influence the children to a certain extent. The mother's food during pregnancy is bound to affect the child. After that during childhood, the mother pampers the child with all sorts of tasty foods. She gives the child a little bit out of whatever she herself may be eating and the child's digestive system gets a wrong training from its infancy. Habits once formed are difficult to shed. There are very few who succeed in getting rid of them. But when the realization comes to man that he is his own bodyguard, and his body has been dedicated to service, he desires to learn the laws of keeping his body in a fit condition and tries hard to follow them.

We have now reached a point when we can lay down the amount of various foods required by a man of sedentary habits, which most men and women who will read these pages, are.

Cow's milk	2 lbs.
Cereals (wheat, rice, *bajri*, in all)	6 oz.
Vegetables leafy	3 oz.
,, others	5 oz.
,, raw	1 oz.
Ghee	1½ oz.
or Butter	2 oz.
Gur or white sugar	1½ oz.

Fresh fruit according to one's taste and purse. In any case it is good to take two sour limes a day. The juice should be squeezed and taken with vegetables or in water, cold or hot.

All these weights are of raw stuff. I have not put down the amount of salt. It should be added afterwards according to taste.

Now, how often should one eat ? Many people take two meals a day. The general rule is to take three meals : breakfast early in the morning and before going out to work, dinner at midday and supper in the evening or later. There is no necessity to have more than three meals. In the cities some people keep on nibbling from time to time. This habit is harmful. The digestive apparatus requires rest.

Key to Health, pp. 13-27, Edn. 1956

CHAPTER 2

UNFIRED FOOD

[In the course of a letter from Coonoor, dated 26-7-1929, addressed to Gandhiji in connection with his experiments in dietetics, Dr. R. McCarrison had written as follows :]

" One of the *great* faults in Indian diets at the present day is their deficiency in vitamin A, in suitable proteins and in certain salts; and the greatest nutritional need of India is the freer use of good milk and its products which supply these factors. There can be no doubt in the minds of those of us who have devoted a life-time to the study of nutrition that milk is one of the greatest blessings given to mankind. And to one like myself, whose work is to learn the truth and spread it, the scarcity of this food in India and the lack of appreciation of its value are matters of grave concern. Do not, I beg of you, decry it; for a pint of milk a day will do more for Young India than most things I wot of. It is, for example, to deficiency of vitamin A that we owe so much disease of the bowels and lungs, so much disease of the bladder (such as 'stone') and so much anaemia in this country.

I am glad you are interesting yourself in the matter of food and I agree with much that you say. But let me assure you that a little more 'fortissimo' on the 'milk and milk-products theme' will do great good when you are leading the orchestra of Truth.

P.S. — When next you make an Andhra tour, avoid "the extreme weakness ", which overtook you in your last one, by taking a pint of milk a day !

[Commenting on Dr. McCarrison's letter Gandhiji wrote as under:]

I publish this letter thankfully and wish that other men versed in medical science would also guide me. In

making the experiment, I am trying to find out the truth about food in so far as it is possible for a layman to do so.

As for Dr. McCarrison's argument about the necessity of animal food, I dare not as a layman combat it, but I may state that there are medical men who are decidedly of opinion that animal food including milk is not necessary for sustaining the human system to the full. By instinct and upbringing I personally favour a purely vegetarian diet, and have for years been experimenting in finding a suitable vegetarian combination. But there is no danger of my decrying milk until I have obtained overwhelming evidence in support of a milkless diet. It is one of the many inconsistencies of my life that whilst I am in my own person avoiding milk, I am conducting a model dairy which is already producing cow's milk that can successfully compete with any such milk produced in India in purity and fat content.

Notwithstanding Dr. McCarrison's claim for medical science I submit that scientists have not yet explored the hidden possibilities of the innumerable seeds, leaves and fruits for giving the fullest possible nutrition to mankind. For one thing the tremendous vested interests that have grown round the belief in animal food prevent the medical profession from approaching the question with complete detachment. It almost seems to me that it is reserved for lay enthusiasts to cut their way through a mountain of difficulties even at the risk of their lives to find the truth. I should be satisfied if scientists would lend their assistance to such humble seekers.

Young India, 15-8-1929

As a searcher for Truth I deem it necessary to find the perfect food for a man to keep body, mind and soul in a sound condition. I believe that the search can only

succeed with unfired food, and that in the limitless vegetable kingdom there is an effective substitute for milk, which, every medical man admits, has its drawbacks and which is designed by nature not for man but for babies and young ones of lower animals. I should count no cost too dear for making a search which in my opinion is so necessary from more points of view than one. I therefore still seek information and guidance from kindred spirits.

Young India, 22-8-1929

If one may take ripe fruit without cooking I see no reason why one may not take vegetables too in an uncooked state provided one can properly digest them. Dieteticians are of opinion that the inclusion of a small quantity of raw vegetables like cucumber, vegetable marrow, pumpkin, gourd, etc., in one's menu is more beneficial to health than the eating of large quantities of the same cooked. But the digestions of most people are very often so impaired through a surfeit of cooked fare that one should not be surprised if at first they fail to do justice to raw greens, though I can say from personal experience that no harmful effect need follow if a *tola* or two of raw greens are taken with each meal provided one masticates them thoroughly. It is a well-established fact that one can derive a much greater amount of nourishment from the same quantity of food if it is masticated well. The habit of proper mastication of food inculcated by the use of uncooked greens, therefore, if it does nothing else, will at least enable one to do with less quantity of food and thus not only make for economy in consumption but also automatically reduce the dietetic *himsa* that one commits to sustain life. Therefore, whether regarded from the viewpoint of dietetics or that of Ahimsa, the use of uncooked

vegetables is not only free from all objection but is to be highly recommended. Of course, it goes without saying that if the vegetables are to be eaten raw extra care will have to be exercised to see that they are not stale, over-ripe or rotten, or otherwise dirty.

Young India, 15-11-1928

CHAPTER 3
VITAL NEED FOR RESEARCH

The unlimited capacity of the plant world to sustain man at his highest is a region yet unexplored by modern medical science which through force of habit pins its faith on the shambles or at least milk and its by-products. It is a duty which awaits discharge by Indian medical men whose tradition is vegetarian. The fast developing researches about vitamins and the possibility of getting the most important of them directly from the sun bid fair to revolutionize many of the accepted theories and beliefs propounded by medical science about food.

Young India, 18-7-1929

I have found after prolonged experiment and observation that there is no fixed dietetic rule for all constitutions. All that the wisest physicians claim for their advice is that it is likely to benefit in a given case as in a majority of cases they have found it to answer fairly well. In no branch of science is the scientist so hampered in his research as in the medical. He dare not speak with certainty of the effect of a single drug or food or of the reactions of human bodies. It is and will always remain empirical. The popular saying that one man's food may be another's poison is based on vast experience which finds daily verification. Such being the case, the field for experiment on the part of intelligent men and

women is limitless. Laymen ought to acquire a workable knowledge of the body which plays such an important part in the evolution of the soul within. And yet about nothing are we so woefully negligent or ignorant as in regard to our bodies. Instead of using the body as a temple of God we use it as a vehicle for indulgences, and are not ashamed to run to medical men for help in our effort to increase them and abuse the earthly tabernacle.

Young India, 8-8-1929

Take up any modern text-book on food or vitamins, and you would find in it a strong recommendation to take a few edible green leaves uncooked at every meal. Of course, these should always be well washed half a dozen times to remove all dirt. These leaves are to be had in every village for the trouble of picking. And yet greens are supposed to be only a delicacy of cities. Villagers in many parts of India live on *dal* and rice or roti, and plenty of chillies, which harm the system. Since the economic re-organization of villages has been commenced with food reform, it is necessary to find out the simplest and cheapest foods that would enable villagers to regain lost health. The addition of green leaves to their meals will enable villagers to avoid many diseases from which they are now suffering. The villagers' food is deficient in vitamins; many of them can be supplied by fresh green leaves.

That, of course, means elaborate research and examination in detail of the nourishing properties of the innumerable leaves that are to be found hidden among the grasses that grow wild in India.

Harijan, 15-2-1935

CHAPTER 4
VEGETARIANISM

A correspondent is born in a meat-eating family. He has successfully resisted the pressure from his parents to return to the flesh-pot. "But", he says, "in a book I have before me, I read the opinion of Swami Vivekanand on the subject and feel a good deal shaken in my belief. The Swami holds that for Indians in their present state flesh-diet is a necessity and he advises his friends to eat flesh freely. He even goes so far as to say, 'if you incur any sin thereby throw it upon me; I will bear it.' I am now in a fix whether to eat flesh or not."

This blind worship of authority is a sign of weakness of mind. If the correspondent has such a deep-seated conviction that flesh-eating is not right, why should he be moved by the opinion to the contrary of the whole world? One needs to be slow to form convictions, but once formed they must be defended against the heaviest odds.

As for the opinion of the great Swami, I have not seen the actual writing but I fear the correspondent has correctly quoted him. My opinion is well known. I do not regard flesh-food as necessary for us at any stage and under any clime in which it is possible for human beings ordinarily to live. I hold flesh-food to be unsuited to our species. We err in copying the lower animal world if we are superior to it. Experience teaches that animal food is unsuited to those who would curb their passions.

But it is wrong to over-estimate the importance of food in the formation of character or in subjugating the flesh. Diet is a powerful factor not to be neglected.

But to sum up all religion in terms of diet, as is often done in India, is as wrong as it is to disregard all restraint in regard to diet and to give full reins to one's appetite. Vegetarianism is one of the priceless gifts of Hinduism. It may not be lightly given up. It is necessary, therefore, to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind or body or passive or inert in action. The greatet Hindu reformers have been the activest in their generation and they have invariably been vegetarians. Who could show greater activity than say Shankara or Dayanand in their times ?

But my correspondent must not accept me as his authority. The choice of one's diet is not a thing to be based on faith. It is a matter for every one to reason out for himself. There has grown up especially in the West an amount of literature on vegetarianism which any seeker after truth may study with profit. Many eminent medical men have contributed to this literature. Here, in India, we have not needed any encouragement for vegetarianism. For it has been hitherto accepted as the most desirable and the most respectable thing. Those, however, who like the correspondent feel shaken, may study the growing movement towards vegetarianism in the West.

Young India, 7-10-1926

One should eat not in order to please the palate but just to keep the body going. When each organ of sense subserves the body and through the body the soul, its special relish disappears, and then alone does it begin to function in the way nature intended it to do.

Any number of experiments is too small and no sacrifice is too great for attaining this symphony with nature. But unfortunately the current is nowadays flowing strongly in the opposite direction. We are not

ashamed to sacrifice a multitude of other lives in decorating the perishable body and trying to prolong its existence for a few fleeting moments, with the result that we kill ourselves, both body and soul. In trying to cure one old disease, we give rise to a hundred new ones; in trying to enjoy the pleasures of sense, we lose in the end even our capacity for enjoyment. All this is passing before our very eyes, but there are none so blind as those who will not see.

Autobiography, p. 237, Edn. 1958

There is a great deal of truth in the saying that man becomes what he eats. The grosser the food the grosser the body.

Harijan, 5-8-1933

I do feel that spiritual progress does demand at some stage that we should cease to kill our fellow creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants. The beautiful lines of Goldsmith occur to me as I tell you of my vegetarian fad:

No flocks that range the valley free
To slaughter I condemn;
Taught by the Power that pities me
I learn to pity them.

India's Case for Swaraj, pp. 402, 403, Edn. 1932

CHAPTER 5
NOT AN END IN ITSELF

Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things, but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.

Young India, 6-10-'21

Abjure brinjals or potatoes by all means, if you will, but do not for heaven's sake begin to feel yourself self-righteous or flatter yourself that you are practising Ahimsa on that account. The very idea is enough to make one blush. Ahimsa is not a mere matter of dietetics, it transcends it. What a man eats or drinks matters little; it is the self-denial, the self-restraint behind it that matters. By all means practise as much restraint in the choice of the articles of your diet as you like. The restraint is commendable, even necessary, but it touches only the fringe of Ahimsa. A man may allow himself a wide latitude in the matter of diet and yet may be a personification of Ahimsa and compel our homage, if his heart overflows with love and melts at another's woe, and has been purged of all passions. On the other hand, a man always overscrupulous in diet is an utter stranger to Ahimsa and a pitiful wretch, if he is a slave to selfishness and passions and is hard of heart.

Young India, 6-9-1928

I am painfully aware of the fact that my desire to continue life in the body involves me in constant *himsa*. That is why I am becoming growingly indifferent to this physical body of mine. For instance, I know that in the act of respiration I destroy innumerable invisible germs floating in the air. But I do not stop breathing The consumption of vegetables involves *himsa*, but I find that I cannot give them up. Again, there is *himsa* in the use of antiseptics, yet I cannot bring myself to discard the use of disinfectants like kerosene, etc., to rid myself of the mosquito pest and the like. I suffer snakes to be killed in the Ashram when it is impossible to catch them and put them out of harm's way. I even tolerate the use of the stick to drive the bullocks in the Ashram. Thus there is no end of *himsa* which I directly and indirectly commit.... If, as a result of this humble confession of mine, friends choose to give me up as lost, I would be sorry, but nothing will induce me to try to conceal my imperfections in the practice of Ahimsa. All I claim for myself is that I am ceaselessly trying to understand the implications of great ideals like Ahimsa and to practise them in thought, word and deed and that not without a certain measure of success as I think. But I know that I have a long distance yet to cover in this direction.

Young India, 1-11-1928

CHAPTER 6

THE MORAL BASIS OF VEGETARIANISM

[Address to the London Vegetarian Society* on 20th November, 1931.]

When I received the invitation to be present at this meeting, I need not tell you how pleased I was, because it revived old memories and recollections of pleasant friendships formed with vegetarians. I feel especially honoured to find on my right Mr. Henry Salt. It was Mr. Salt's book, *A Plea for Vegetarianism*, which showed me why, apart from a hereditary habit, and apart from my adherence to a vow administered to me by my mother, it was right to be a vegetarian. He showed me why it was a moral duty incumbent on vegetarians not to live upon fellow-animals. It is, therefore, a matter of additional pleasure to me that I find Mr. Salt in our midst.

I do not propose to take up your time by giving you my various experiences of vegetarianism, nor do I want to tell you something of the great difficulty that faced me in London itself in remaining staunch to vegetarianism, but I would like to share with you some of the thoughts that have developed in me in connection with vegetarianism. Forty years ago I used to mix freely with vegetarians. There was at that time hardly a vegetarian restaurant in London that I had not

*During his student days in England Gandhiji had become a member of this Society and had been elected subsequently as its Secretary. Dr. Oldfield was President. In 1931, when Gandhiji was in England for the Round Table Conference on India, he was invited to address the Society.

visited. I made it a point, out of curiosity, and to study the possibilities of vegetarianism and vegetarian restaurants in London, to visit every one of them. Naturally, therefore, I came into close contact with many vegetarians. I found at the tables, that largely the conversation turned upon food and disease. I found also that the vegetarians who were struggling to stick to their vegetarianism were finding it difficult from health point of view. I do not know whether, nowadays, you have those debates, but I used at that time to attend debates that were held between vegetarians and vegetarians, and between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. I remember one such debate, between Dr. Densmore and the late Dr. T. R. Allinson. Then vegetarians had a habit of talking of nothing but food and nothing but disease. I feel that that is the worst way of going about the business. I notice also that it is those persons who become vegetarians because they are suffering from some disease or other — that is, from purely the health point of view— it is those persons who largely fall back. I discovered that for remaining staunch to vegetarianism a man requires a moral basis.

For me that was a great discovery in my search after truth. At an early age, in the course of my experiments, I found that a selfish basis would not serve the purpose of taking a man higher and higher along the paths of evolution. What was required was an altruistic purpose. I found also that health was by no means the monopoly of vegetarians. I found many people having no bias one way or the other, and that non-vegetarians were able to show, generally speaking, good health. I found also that several vegetarians found it impossible to remain vegetarians because they had made food a fetish and because they thought that by becoming

vegetarians they could eat as much lentils, haricot beans, and cheese as they liked. Of course those people could not possibly keep their health. Observing along these lines, I saw that a man should eat sparingly and now and then fast. No man or woman really ate sparingly or consumed just that quantity which the body requires and no more. We easily fall a prey to the temptations of the palate, and therefore when a thing tastes delicious we do not mind taking a morsel or two more. But you cannot keep health under those circumstances. Therefore I discovered that in order to keep health, no matter what you ate, it was necessary to cut down the quantity of your food, and reduce the number of meals. Become moderate; err on the side of less, rather than on the side of more. When I invite friends to share their meals with me I never press them to take anything except only what they require. On the contrary, I tell them not to take a thing if they do not want it.

What I want to bring to your notice is that vegetarians need to be tolerant if they want to convert others to vegetarianism. Adopt a little humility. We should appeal to the moral sense of the people who do not see eye to eye with us. If a vegetarian became ill, and a doctor prescribed beef-tea, then I would not call him a vegetarian. A vegetarian is made of sterner stuff. Why? Because it is for the building of the spirit and not of the body. Man is more than meat. It is the spirit in man for which we are concerned. Therefore vegetarians should have that moral basis — that a man was not born a carnivorous animal, but born to live on the fruits and herbs that the earth grows. I know we must all err. I would give up milk if I could, but I cannot. I have made that experiment times without number I could not, after a serious illness, regain my stren gt

unless I went back to milk. That has been the tragedy of my life. But the basis of my vegetarianism is not physical, but moral. If anybody said that I should die if I did not take beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice, I would prefer death. That is the basis of my vegetarianism. I would love to think that all of us who called ourselves vegetarians should have that basis. There were thousands of meat-eaters who did not stay meat-eaters. There must be a definite reason for our making that change in our lives, for our adopting habits and customs different from society, even though sometimes that change may offend those nearest and dearest to us. Not for the world should you sacrifice a moral principle. Therefore the only basis for having a vegetarian society and proclaiming a vegetarian principle is, and must be, a moral one. I am not to tell you, as I see and wander about the world, that vegetarians, on the whole, enjoy much better health than meat-eaters. I belong to a country which is predominantly vegetarian by habit or necessity. Therefore I cannot testify that that shows much greater endurance, much greater courage, or much greater exemption from disease. Because it is a peculiar, personal thing. It requires obedience, and scrupulous obedience, to all the laws of hygiene.

Therefore, I think that what vegetarians should do is not to emphasize the physical consequences of vegetarianism, but to explore the moral consequences. While we have not yet forgotton that we share many things in common with the beast, we do not sufficiently realize that there are certain things which differentiate us from the beast. Of course, we have vegetarians in the cow and the bull — which are better vegetarians than we are — but there is something much higher

which calls us to vegetarianism. Therefore, I thought that, during the few minutes which I give myself the privilege of addressing you, I would just emphasize the moral basis of vegetarianism. And I would say that I have found from my own experience, and the experience of thousands of friends and companions, that they find satisfaction, so far as vegetarianism is concerned, from the moral basis they have chosen for sustaining vegetarianism.

In conclusion, I thank you all for coming here and allowing me to see vegetarians face to face. I cannot say I used to meet you forty or forty-two years ago. I suppose the faces of the London Vegetarian Society have changed. There are very few members who, like Mr. Salt, can claim association with the Society extending over forty years. Lastly, I would like you, if you want to, to ask me any questions, for I am at your disposal for a few minutes.

[Gandhiji was then asked to give his reasons for limiting his daily diet to five articles only, and (he) replied :]

That has no connection with vegetarianism.... There was another reason. I had been a pampered child of nature. I had acquired then that notoriety that when I was invited to friends, they placed before me ample dishes of food. I told them I had come there to serve, and, personally, I should find myself dying by inches if I allowed myself to be pampered like that. So, in limiting myself to five ingredients of food, I served a double purpose. And I must finish all my eating before sundown. I have been saved many pitfalls by that. There are many discoveries about that in regard to health reasons. Dietists are saying that we are more and more tending towards simplifying diet, and that if one must live for health one must have one thing at

a time and avoid harmful combinations. I like the process of exclusion better than that of inclusion, because no two doctors have the same opinion.

Then, I think the restriction to five articles of food has helped me morally and materially—materially because, in a poor country like India it is not always possible to procure goat's milk, and it is a hard thing to produce fruit and grapes. Then, I go to visit poor people, and if I expected hot-house grapes, they would banish me. So, by restricting myself to five articles of food, it also serves the law of economy.

Harijan, 20-2-1949

CHAPTER 7
OUR DAILY DIET

Rice

Whole, unpolished rice is unprocurable in the bazars. It is beautiful to look at and rich and sweet to the taste. Mills can never compete with this unpolished rice. It is husked in a simple manner. Most of the paddy can be husked in a light *chakki* without difficulty. There are some varieties the husk of which is not separated by grinding. The best way of treating such paddy is to boil it first and then separate the chaff from the grain. This rice, it is said, is most nutritious and, naturally, the cheapest. In the villages, if they husk their own paddy, it must always be cheaper for the peasants than the corresponding mill-husked rice, whether polished or unpolished. The majority of rice, found ordinarily in the bazars is always more or less polished, whether hand-husked or mill-husked. Wholly unpolished rice is always hand-husked and is every time

cheaper than the mill-husked rice, the variety being the same.

Harijan, 25-1-1935

Wheat

That branless (wheat) flour is as bad as polished rice is the universal testimony of medical men. Whole-wheat flour ground in one's own *chakki* is any day superior to, and cheaper than, the fine flour to be had in the bazars. It is cheaper because the cost of grinding is saved. Again, in the whole-wheat flour there is no loss of weight. In fine flour there is loss of weight. The richest part of wheat is contained in its bran. There is a terrible loss of nutrition when the bran of wheat is removed. The villagers and others who eat whole-wheat flour ground in their own *chakkis* save their money and, what is more important, their health. A large part of the millions that flour-mills make will remain in and circulate among the deserving poor when village grinding is revived.

Harijan, 1-2-1935

Cereals

Another physician quotes a text against the use of sprouted pulses but he too lacks actual experience for supporting his text. And this has been my complaint against many Ayurvedic physicians. I have no doubt that there is abundant ancient wisdom buried in the Sanskrit medical works. Our physicians appear to be too lazy to unearth that wisdom in the real sense of the term. They are satisfied with merely repeating the printed formula. Even as a layman I know many virtues are claimed for several Ayurvedic preparations. But where is their use, if they cannot be demonstrated today? I plead for the sake of this ancient science for a spirit of genuine search among our Ayurvedic physicians.

I am as anxious as the tallest among them can be to free ourselves from the tyranny of Western medicines which are ruinously expensive and the preparation of which takes no count of the higher humanities.

Young India, 8-8-1929

Milk

It is my firm conviction that man need take no milk at all, beyond the mother's milk that he takes as a baby. His diet should consist of nothing but sun-baked fruits and nuts. He can secure enough nourishment both for the tissues and the nerves from fruits like grapes and nuts like almonds. Restraint of the sexual and other passions becomes easy for a man who lives on such food. My co-workers and I have seen by experience that there is much truth in the Indian proverb that as a man eats, so shall he become.

Autobiography, p. 200, Edn. 1958

Honey

My own experience of taking honey mixed with hot water extends to more than four years. I have experienced no ill-effect whatsoever. Objection has also been raised against the use of honey on humanitarian grounds. This objection has, I admit, considerable force though the Western method of gathering honey is cleaner and less open to objection. I fear that if I would be strictly logical I should have to cut down many things I take or use. But life is not governed by strict logic. It is an organic growth, seemingly irregular, growth following its own law and logic....Western doctors bestow high praise upon it. Most of them who condemn the use of sugar in unmeasured terms speak highly of honey which they say does not irritate as refined sugar or even *gur* does.

Young India, 8-8-1929

Gur

According to the medical testimony...*gur* is any day superior to refined sugar in food value, and if the villagers cease to make *gur* as they are beginning to do, they will be deprived of an important food adjunct for their children. They may do without *gur* themselves, but their children cannot without undermining their stamina....Retention of *gur* and its use by the people in general means several crores of rupees retained by the villagers.

Harijan 1-2-1935

Fruits

No one perhaps, as far as I know, has eaten as much fruit as I have, having lived for six years on entirely fruits and nuts and always having had a liberal supply of fruit as part of my ordinary diet. But I had in my mind, when writing, the special conditions of India. Its people should have, by reason of its extent and variety of climate, a most liberal supply of fruits, vegetables and milk. Yet it is the poorest country in this respect. I therefore suggested what seemed to me to be feasible. But I heartily endorse the proposition that for retaining health fresh fruit and fresh vegetables should form the main part of our diet. It is for the medical profession to study the peculiar condition of India and suggest the list of vegetables and fruit which are or can be easily and cheaply grown in the villages for local consumption. Wild berries, for instance, grow abundantly. They may not be taken to the market for sale but can be used for the picking. This is a vast field for research. It can bring neither money nor perhaps fame. But it may earn the gratitude of dumb millions.

Harijan, 15-3-1942

Green Leaves

I had introduced to me the leaves of *sarsav, suva,* turnip-tops, carrot-tops, radish-tops and pea-nut leaves. Besides these, it is hardly necessary to state that the radish, turnip and carrot tubers are also known to be edible in their raw state. It is waste of money and 'good' taste to cook these leaves or tubers. The vitamins contained in these vegetables are wholly or partially lost in cooking. I have called cooking these waste of 'good' taste, because the uncooked vegetables have a natural good taste of their own which is destroyed by cooking.

Harijan, 15-2-1935

Condiments

Common salt may be rightly counted as the king among condiments. Many people cannot eat their food without it. The body requires certain salts and common salt is one of them. These salts occur naturally in the various foodstuffs but when food is cooked in an unscientific way, e.g. throwing away the water in which rice, potatoes or other vegetables have been boiled, the supply becomes inadequate. The deficiency then has to be made up by a separate addition of salts. As common salt is one of the most essential salts for the body,...it might be supplemented in small quantities.

But several condiments are not required by the body as a general rule, e.g. chillies fresh or dry, peper, turmeric, coriander, caraway, mustard, *methi*, asafoetida, etc. These are taken just for the satisfaction of the palate. My opinion, based on my personal experience of fifty years, is that not one of these is needed to keep perfectly healthy. Those whose digestion has become very feeble might take these things as medicines for a certain length of time, if considered necessary. But one

should make it a point to avoid their use for the satisfaction of the palate. All condiments, even salt, destroy the natural flavour of vegetables and cereals etc. Those whose palate has not become vitiated enjoy the natural flavour of the foodstuffs much more than after the addition of salt or other condiments. That is why I have said that salt should be taken when necessary as an adjunct. As for chillies, they burn the mouth and irritate the stomach. Those who are not in the habit of taking chillies cannot bear them in the beginning. I have seen several cases of sore mouth caused by the taking of chillies. I know of one case who was very fond of chillies, and an excessive use resulted in his premature death.

Key to Health, pp. 27-29, Edn. 1956

CHAPTER 8
MINIMUM DIET

Use one grain at a time. *Chapati*, rice and pulses, milk, *ghee*, *gur* and oil are used in ordinary households besides vegetables and fruit. I regard this as an unhealthy combination. Those who get animal protein in the shape of milk, cheese, eggs or meat need not use pulses at all. The poor people get only vegetable protein. If the well-to-do give up pulses and oils, they set free these two essentials for the poor who get neither animal protein nor animal fat. Then the grain eaten should not be sloppy. Half the quantity suffices when it is eaten dry and not dipped in any gravy. It is well to eat it with raw salads such as onion, carrot, radish, salad leaves, tomatoes. An ounce or two of salads serve the purpose of eight ounces of cooked vegetables. *Chapatis* or bread should not be eaten with milk. To begin with, one meal may be raw vegetables and *chapati*

or bread, and the other cooked vegetables with milk or curds.

Sweet dishes should be eliminated altogether. Instead *gur* in small quantities may be taken with milk or bread or by itself.

Fresh fruit is good to eat, but only a little is necessary to give tone to the system. It is an expensive article, and an over-indulgence by the well-to-do has deprived the poor and the ailing of an article which they need much more than the well-to-do.

Any medical man who has studied the science of dietetics will certify that what I have suggested can do no harm to the body, on the contrary it must conduce to better health.

Harijan, 25-1-1942

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